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The articles in this journal issue present four methods for developing units in expository and creative writing instruction. The titles of the articles and their authors are as follows: (1) "A Writing Unit: Ten or Twenty Kids on Their 10-Speeds" (Joyce S. Steward); (2) "Great Painting, Great Writing" (Keith F. Voos); (3) "Building a Character: Fiction Writing and the Stanislavski Method" (David P. Brunet); and (4) "Developing a Composition Skills Curriculum Guide" (Karen Hirsch and Avril Font). Reviews of selected books for children, adolescents, and teachers are included. (HTH)

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COMPOSITION: UNITS FOR TEACHING

For English Teachers At All Levels

October, 1982 Volume 25, No. 1

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WISCONSIN ENGLISH JOURNAL

For English Teachers at All Levels

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Wisconsin English Journal

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CHISHOLM AWARD FOR MERITORIUS SERVICE

Citation for NEIL VAIL

The Chisholm Award this year is being presented to a versatile man. He serves as the Director of Reading/Language Arts for the Racine Unified School District. He has been a consultant for numerous book companies and school districts, as well as an instructor in language arts methods at all levels K-12. He is well-known for his contributions to language arts in Wisconsin. He has served on the State Superintendent of Schools Blue Ribbon Commission on Competency-based Education, the DPI Assessment of Reading and Writing Commission, the Assessment of Speech and Drama Commission, and the Wisconsin-Illinois Commission on Literacy.

Besides this, he has been involved in designing and writing composition guides for the DPI. He was a workshop leader for the Wisconsin Educational Radio Network in reading, language arts, and library services.

He has also been active on the national level, writing for their publications and serving as a member of the NCTE Commission on the Verbally Talented.

We in the Council also know and appreciate his valuable contributions. After starting as the Director from the Southeast District, he has become our membership chairman. This involves not only keeping the records, but also handling all the promotional activities. He has also become our publisher of newsletters, service bulletins, and teaching procedures.

For his many hours of valuable service to the profession, the WCTE is happy to present the 1982 Francis P. Chisholm Award to Neil Vail.

--written by *Nancy Hoefs*
Nicolet High School, Milwaukee

PLANS FOR A WRITING UNIT – "TEN OR TWENTY KIDS ON THEIR 10-SPEEDS"

JOYCE S. STEWARD
Professor Emeritus
University of Wisconsin — Madison

A. Bartlett Giamatti in his much-quoted article "The Writing Gap" points out the need for a "broader view," for realizing that "It is impossible for one person or even one academic department to prepare students to write." This unit, suggesting a broad view (like many others, inspired by Eliot Wigginton's marvelous *Foxfire* project) offers a way to combine learning to write with history-government, speech, journalism, art and photography, shop and physical education! With a few adjustments the plan can work at almost any level of middle school or high school, and certainly can win school-wide readership for the publications which may grow out of the project. Here is an answer for the class in need of 1) something to write about, 2) a real-life audience to write for, 3) practice writing in various modes or formats, 4) ways to integrate the work of a variety of disciplines. And the project just might interest almost everyone in a community: the parents, businessmen, police departments, Boy and Girl Scout leaders, newspaper personnel--and most of all, the kids themselves.

Beginning with a part of student life outside school--that ever-present bicycle--the project is open-ended and can fan out as time and location allow. Publication -- within the class, in the school, or in the community -- will, of course, teach revision, proof-reading, and lay-out.

Purpose: To teach many writing skills through a meaningful group project; interview techniques, research methods, and related speech activities can all be handled with this unit. The work could easily extend to include photography and art; in some schools students who are interested in mechanics could correlate shop practice with writing.

Audience: Schoolmates, the school generally, people in the community. Reach others by ditto-copy, any form of publishing that is possible, or by display on school bulletin boards. Local newspapers will probably be interested.

Topics for papers, reports, paragraph sketches, other writing activities	A. Areas for emphasis in pre-teaching; pre-writing activities B. Special writing skills involved
Journal accounts of bike trips (personal writing	A. Observation; notetaking during/after bike trip B. Keeping specifics clear through sequence and verb tenses. Selecting interesting bits from journals and organizing for reader
Article on bicycle camping trip for information: what to take, how to plan, suggestions for safe riding and camping	A. Collecting data from first-hand experience and/or interviewing officials, other campers, etc. B. Working on organization and clarity, overall and in sentences

Article on "Buying a Bike" Here you might have a general article, plus one or two close analytical tables and summaries on two bikes (add more if more students are interested) especially recommended	A. Collecting facts from reading, visits to bike shops, and from actual road test procedures (consumer guides, brochures and ads) B. Using factual material; supplementing words with tables, diagrams, and maps Organizing a comparison--sentences and paragraphs that compare
Same design could be used for article on "Repairing and Maintaining Your Bike"	B. Including quotes in writing; selection of drawings if needed. Citing sources properly
"Bike for Health"--informative or persuasive articles	A. Library research; interviewing doctors and people who ride for health B. Drawing conclusion from factual data Selecting materials; using quotes in paragraphs; methods of citation and punctuation Creating catchy beginnings; using anecdotes Presenting statistical information in context
"Nice Places to Ride and See" (could have accompanying sketches or photographs)	A. Exploration of area--observe parks, routes, streets, special attractions B. Giving clear directions--process; taking care in order and sentence structure
Character sketches or interviews (could set up as dialogue) with bicyclists in area, with persons interested in biking, or someone who has taken a long bicycle tour (Olympic racers, special shop owners, youth group leader, etc.)	A. Interviewing and collecting information B. Choosing and presenting vivid details in report and description Developing paragraphs to give sufficient picture
Report on state of bicycle legislation	A. Library research--letters to legislators and local officials B. Reporting clearly--style and methods; listing or itemizing clearly. This could become persuasive in some cases, stressing selection to convince; choosing effective tone, voice
Editorials on aspects of bike safety, needed legislation, etc. (Each editorial would take only one aspect) Reports on present legal rules governing bicycles	A. Investigative research--both in library, from local news reports, with visit to local officials, observation in police station, etc. Review editorials in newspapers and magazines; study editorial techniques B. Controlling tone; choosing language to persuade Giving opinions clearly with evidence to support stand of writer

Features of many kinds--human interest "stories" History of bicycles Bicycling in Europe Romance on a two-seater	A. Study feature articles in magazines and papers; stress interest in colorful events, beginnings, anecdotes B. Beginning in interesting manner Tracing or telling lively story Choosing leads and styles to attract reader Taking care with form
Letters to American Youth Hostels, other groups that have accommodations for bicycle riders (Report or print both letter and answer if possible)	A. Check ads, information bulletins; evaluate information in articles and ads B. Letter form, care in writing Framing effective questions
Book reviews of bicycle guides, tour books, etc.	A. Study form of published reviews B. Careful collection of enough information on book, the substance for any evaluation

Putting a project such as this together for "sharing" requires care in revision, proof-reading, even hand-writing or typing.

A UNIT ON BICYCLING, with RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIAL STUDIES CLASS

If history begins at home, with relevance to the lives of students, try exploring various areas "on their level," with material related to their everyday experience.

AREAS	ACTIVITIES
LAWS--"BIKE POLITICS"	1) Investigate legislation re. bicycles--local, state, national. a) licensing practices b) provisions for paths/roadways/trails c) car-bike laws d) appropriations (might lead to study of budgets, allocations made by various agencies) e) enforcement practices (interview police officers, etc.) f) safety regulations (helmets? lights? Some states have a "safety headgear required" law for motorcycles and bicyclists. Check this sort of practice in other places.) g) "Bikes prohibited"--trespassing laws.
COURTS	2) Investigate legal actions of court cases involving bikes--assess procedures, outcomes, etc. a) theft--bicycles are often stolen; check on number of thefts, retrieval, insurability, etc. b) bike-car tangles--does a bicyclist ever win?
HISTORY	3) Investigate invention and development of the bicycle. a) use in various countries: especially Denmark, Holland, France, Italy, Great Britain, and Japan. b) bikes and the mails c) bicycling as sport: racing, both road and track. d) great names in the annals of bicycling. e) organizations (LAW, BLA, others) prominent in bicycle history. Relate also to youth hostel movement.

BUSINESS	4) Investigate statistics on growth of bicycle business--the economy and bicycles. a) import-export laws and statistics b) conservation of energy--survey community effort to publicize bike-to-work weeks, etc.
MAPS--SURVEYING	5) Experience being a cartographer and log-keeper. a) rides and routes: make actual maps to indicate special kinds of information. This map-making and trip log-keeping could easily be related to some reading about logs of sailors, early American diaries (Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation*; Byrd's "History of the Dividing Line"; Sarah Kemble Knight, etc.) b) historic maps--ride an historic trail or country road; make a map as an early explorer might have done. Get information from state conservation and recreation departments.
LINGUISTICS	6) Investigate and list terms peculiar to bicycling. a) names applied to the invention itself. b) French and Italian (particularly) terms for various parts of bikes or practices in the sport.

A Partial Bibliography

(Your librarian can add to the list.)

All About Bicycle Racing, Editors *Bike World*, World Publications, Mountain View, Calif., 1975.

Armstrong, David. *Merckyx, The Man and Myth.* Kennedy Brothers Ltd., Yorkshire, England.
Story, with photos, of Europe's greatest athlete. Winner of more Tours de France than any other racer in the history of cycling.

Bicycling! Rodale Press, Inc., Emmaus, Pa.
Monthly glossy magazine featuring all aspects of the sport.

Call, Frances, with Merle E. Dowd. *The Practical Book of Bicycling.* E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., New York, 1973.
Highly interesting account of three different groups of junior high students who biked from Seattle, Washington, to the East Coast. Also contains helpful information on minor repairs, etc.

Colligan, Doug, and Dick Teresi. *The Cyclist's Manual.* Sterling Publishing Co., 1981.
Covers buying and riding a bike, touring, racing and riding techniques.

Cuthbertson, Tom. *Anybody's Bike Book.* Ten-Speed Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1971.
Paperback or hardcover. Excellent cartoons, widely recognized source of information on everything from buying a bike to general repairs.

Cuthbertson, Tom. *Bike Tripping.* Ten-Speed Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1972.
Informally written guide to riding and riding techniques. Includes information on in-town "tripping" as well as longer distance touring.

Durry, J., and J. B. Wadley. *Bicycling.* Sterling Publishing Co., New York, 1977.
A Guinness Superlatives Ltd. Guide, stunning in scope and use of photography.

Hawkins, Karen and Gary. *Bicycle Touring in Europe.* Pantheon Books, New York, 1973.
Tips and hints on the authors' experiences travelling by bicycle in various European countries. Includes some suggested riding routes.

Hellman, Gail. *Bicycle Touring.* Great Outdoors Trading Co., Marshall, Calif., 1980.
A reference guide to outfitting and a source book for general touring.

Henkel, Stephen C. *Bikes*. Bantam Paperback, New York, 1972.
Inexpensive guide to maintenance, repair, and safety. Illustrated.

Kolin, Michael, and Denise de la Rosa. *The Custom Bicycle*. Rodale Press, Inc., Emmaus, Pa., 1979.
Technical information on design, theory, and construction of ten-speed bicycles.

Kolin, Michael, and Denise de la Rosa. *The Ten Speed Bicycle*. Rodale Press, Inc., Emmaus, Pa., 1979.
Understanding, maintaining, and riding tips.

Lieb, Thom. *Everybody's Book of Bicycle Riding*. Rodale Press, Inc., Emmaus, Pa., 1981.
A basic guide for the novice to intermediate rider.

McCullagh, James, editor. *American Bicycle Racing*. Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pa., 1976.

Rakowski, John. *Adventure Cycling in Europe*. Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pa., 1981.
A guide to touring in twenty-seven countries.

Rennert, Jack. *100 Years of Bicycle Posters*. Harper & Row, New York, 1973.
Beautifully designed collection of new and antique bicycle posters in full color. Some commentary on how the bicycle influenced society and art.

Sarnoff, Jane, and Reynold Ruffins. *A Great Bicycle Book*. Charles Scribners Sons, New York, 1973.
Very modern graphically. Aims mostly at kids (junior and senior high age) with entertaining and amusing text covering topics from maintenance to riding techniques.

Sloane, Eugene A. *The New Complete Book of Bicycling*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1974.
Revised and enlarged edition of the first really complete bicycle text. Contains data on buying a bike, repairs, riding techniques, etc.

Whiter, Robert. *The Bicycle Manual*. Laurida Books, Hollywood, Calif., 1972.
A complete handbook for the do-it-yourself mechanic. Excellent diagrams. Easy to understand.

Wilhelm, Tim and Glenda. *The Bicycle Touring Book*. Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pa., 1980.
All about cycling recreation.

Wolfe, Frederick L. *The Bicycle, a Commuting Alternative*. Signpost Books, Lynnwood, Wa., 1979.
Manual by a professional bicycle facilities planner.

Other sources of information on various subjects:

Bikecentennial, Box 8308, Missoula, Montana 59807

League of American Wheelmen, 19 S. Bothwell, Palatine, Il. 60067 (national organization for cyclists)

American Youth Hostels, 20 West 17th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011 (organization for young people. Operates hostels for overnight accommodations for cyclists. Also publishes several bicycle pieces, including the *North American Bicycle Atlas* and *The Hosteler*.)

Boy's Life, the Boy Scout Magazine, carries a monthly bicycle column. The scouts have a merit badge guide book on bicycling.

Conservation, recreation, or highway departments in almost every state will furnish guides to bicycle touring and laws in the area. For instance, in Wisconsin, a series of guide books to bicycle trails in various counties is published by *Wisconsin Trails Magazine*, 2564 Branch, Middleton, Wisconsin.

CREATIVE TEACHING AWARDS

The ninth Lucille S. Pooley Creative Teaching Award, sponsored by the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, was presented to Keith F. Voos at the council's spring conference. David P. Brunet received the runner-up award; see page 12.

GREAT PAINTING, GREAT WRITING

KEITH F. VOOS
Stoughton Middle School

It is a truism of modern writing instruction that children should be asked to write about only those things that they know. But teachers who accept this august dictum too literally condemn themselves to slogging through a dreary succession of baseball stories from certain ninth grade shortstops and grindingly monotonous chapters of a continuing horse ballad from certain fifth grade equestriennes. You know the genres: the last-inning-of-the-last-game-of-the-Series-with-bases-loaded-two-men-out-two-strikes-with-little-Tommy-Twerp-at-the-bat cliffhanger, and the destitute-waif-scrapes-together-an-entrance-fee-to-the-Derby-in-which-she-oh-so-suspensefully-triumphs-so-that-her-saintly-mother-can-die-in-a-clean-hospital-bed tearjerker.

Familiarity has bred something deeper and more abiding than contempt for these overworked forms, but what can be done? Children *know* baseball, they *know* horses. Do they know industrial strife in late medieval Flanders? Or the folkloric origins of "The Firebird Ballet"? Or Renaissance painting? No, of course not, but a modicum of imagination, and I dare say, creativity, on a teacher's part can make them genuinely enough aware of experiences outside their immediate tactile range of knowledge to enable them to write on a gratifyingly wide spectrum of topics.

Take the Renaissance painting, for example. Teachers can, without impossible difficulties, expose children not only to painting from the Renaissance but to samples of painting from all the world's great historic traditions, cultivating over a several week period an interest in painting which leads to truly fresh and exciting writing.

The unit I have in mind has appeared in several avatars in five years of experimenting with it, most recently as "Great Painting, Great Writing." It utilizes one of the world's most powerful modes of expression, painting, to catalyze another, the written word, and has never in my experience failed to call forth student writing of wonderful charm, ingenuity, and vividness. The premise is simple--students look at a variety of paintings, choose one they really like, and write about it--but the complexity and value of the outcomes belies the simplicity of the approach.

I use a set of prints from the *Metropolitan Seminars in Art*, by John Canady, (N.Y., 1958), though any large and varied selection of prints will do. In a pinch, you could use books of reproductions, but these limit accessibility. Besides, having students enter a room afire with color from prints spread over all available surfaces is a dazzling opening for the unit. In any event, students should have a wide range of prints to investigate. Some will be delighted by the colors of the impressionists,

others amazed and somewhat shocked at the grotesque images of Bosch and Dali, so like their own nightmares and dark fantasies, scenes they had not known to be expressed or even expressible in the light of day. Encountering, especially for the first time, the world's great painting in the almost infinite variety of its subject matter, its treatment of human interaction and mood, can be a process of intense self-discovery, an altogether necessary corollate to self-expression, written or otherwise. So, obtain the most varied possible collection of prints and begin the "Great Painting, Great Writing" unit.

The unit consists of three lessons, assigned at one-week intervals: a description of a painting, an essay exploring the mood or feeling the painting gives the writer and why it does, and a short story inspired by the painting.

In preparation for giving the first assignment, I always consult with my students' art teacher to see how much "art appreciation" they have had. Most school art instruction for children consists--and rightly so--of creative activity, and students probably will have had very little of the kind of study that provides preparation for the painting/writing unit. The more they *have* had, the better.

In any case, before the students choose their paintings, one or two preparatory lessons should be devoted to observing prints in a way that helps them see what a painting is about and organizes their thinking about it. Focus on the prints' subjects, colors, and compositional elements. With a little practice, a teacher and students together can determine where a painting's focal point is and where the observer's eye wanders from there. Open-ended exploration of a painting's visual qualities can provide genuine opportunities to learn on an equal footing with students, to ask real rather than rhetorical questions, and to let kids know that you too are curious and tentative. Children see this sort of activity both as a challenge and as a personalization of the classroom on their teacher's part.

So, step one: look and enjoy. Then, these preliminaries completed, spread before the students the array of prints from which they are allowed to pick one as their special subject. Explain that they will be doing three written assignments, including a short story, about the painting they choose. This is important information. Some students have trouble generating much from abstract expressionism though they may like the looks of it. Many, knowing about the story, choose to stick with something more representational.

Encourage children to write about a painting no one else has chosen. Ask students to list three choices and try to get paintings assigned as soon after choices are made as possible. By this time, students are invariably fired up and ready to write!

Give the students as much direct access to the prints as you can. Ask them to observe their painting carefully (talking about the idea of observation from science class is not inappropriate here) and then direct them to write a description of what the painting looks like.

Aided by the practice in observing prints just completed, students will be able to locate a painting's focal point and describe it fully, be it a person's face, a gnarled tree, or a vibrant mass of abstract color. From the focal point, the description should proceed along the painting's lines of movement until all parts of the print have been accounted for in writing. Needless to say, this kind of assignment is well suited to the

use of topic sentences in paragraphs: the topic-sentence draws attention to the object or area to be written about, the remainder of the paragraph supplies the supporting detail. Students should be directed to use the final paragraph for making general observations: "The artist uses a lot of bright colors." "All the people in the painting look tired and hungry." "Most of the action is in the center. The corners are dark and uninteresting." Etc.

As the teacher explains the guidelines for writing the description, he or she should stress keeping story elements out of the assignment, and sticking to description. This restriction serves the goal of reinforcing the distinction among kinds of writing. Descriptive writing can be, and in this case is, different from fictional writing, and noting the difference in this series of assignments highlights what is, among students at all grade levels, a tenaciously elusive distinction.

I need to say also that I don't expect the description to be any less good in terms of writing than the exciting and plotful story which will follow it. (I always teach this unit in the spring. One reason for this is that by April or May almost all students have had more practice with metaphorical language than will have been possible in the fall.) This language should--and can be--put to its highest use in a description of the kind under discussion. A spattering of yellow "like the sun" can dominate a print, a student can notice "a big dark highway of color," or an angry woman can look madder "than my mom when I don't clean up my room." Description does not have to be listless or repetitive, and the description of a notable painting is one of the best ways I know of to demonstrate this fact.

The general observations which conclude the first assignment in the unit provide the springboard for the second, which is entitled a "Mood Essay." This title is broadly utilitarian, for it is meant to refer both to the mood or feeling inchoate in the painting itself (assuming, of course, some relationship betwen the two). This point is perhaps best made by listing the questions which the students are asked to respond to in writing the second assignment:

1. What made you choose the painting you did?
2. What do you like about the painting? (Is there anything you dislike?)
3. What mood or feeling do you think the artist was trying to communicate in this painting? (Is the painting active or restful? Hot or cold?)
4. How do you think the artist has given you that feeling?
   a. Was it the subject that he/she painted?
   b. Has he/she used certain colors that create a feeling?
   c. Has he/she used interesting shapes, lines, or designs?
5. What do you think of when you see this painting? What does the painting remind you of?
6. What action are you most likely to do after seeing this painting?
7. Could the artist change the mood of the painting by changing colors, shapes, and lines, or would the entire subject have to be different in order to give a different mood?
8. Is your painting "pretty"?
   a. Does a painting have to be pretty for people to like it?
9. Do you think there is a better way to paint a picture of the same subject or with the same feeling as your picture? If so, how?

Obviously, these questions are very wide-ranging, and students should be given a great deal of latitude in using them to prepare for the essay. If they are discussed extensively before writing begins, some students will get a good idea of what the assignment is about solely through the discussion and will write excellent essays without specific reference to them at all. However, a larger number of students will need to use them as tangible guidelines, grouping certain questions together in their minds

and responding directly to those within single paragraphs. (Please note the analyzing and organizing skills required.) For the poorest writers in a group, it will be necessary to allow one-to-one, answer-to-question responses in as fully developed a manner as possible, encouraging paragraph use for each answer, along with introductory and concluding paragraphs.

Allowing students to respond to the "Mood Essay" questions in the way best suited to their temperaments and abilities not only "individualizes" the assignment but also signals to them that almost any kind of response, as long as it is thoughtful and well-written, is acceptable, surely a valuable lesson to stress in a unit focusing on human creativity.

During the two weeks that students have been studying and writing about their paintings, they have become very familiar with them. Sharing their writing with classmates through posting or oral readings often starts a dialogue that forces students to take an even closer look at the prints, re-examining and sometimes defending the observations made about them. It is not uncommon for children to develop almost proprietary interest in a painting, and statements like "El Greco meant this painting to be sad," or, "If you can't see this is a happy painting, you're crazy," are frequent. In other words, at the two-thirds point of the unit, students know their paintings nearly as well as they know baseball or horses, and they're ready to write knowingly and feelingly about them.

This makes directions for the last assignment easy; in essence, just write a story about the painting. Of course, you will need to elaborate a little, telling students that they may wish to write concerning what is taking place, has taken place, or is about to take place in their paintings. Another choice is to transmit the tale of how or why the print was painted, ignoring its internal content altogether. Really, students have plenty of story ideas by this time, so be flexible and let them get started. And--this is important--try not to be startled by the vigor and variety of the results.

El Greco's *View of Toledo* is a perennial favorite; there is something about its swirling clouds that all but compels children to populate the otherwise pretty medieval scene with wizards and other evil-doers. In a similar fashion, beneath the symmetrical tranquility of Hondrian's *Farmhouse With Trees*, there lurks an obscure menace (it's the colors, I think), and incidents of shocking violence habitually take place there.

The results of this last assignment will make you proud, and deserve some kind of special attention. A fitting culmination to the unit is to print all the stories in a mimeographed booklet for class members, selected teachers and other district personnel, and possibly to present readings from them accompanied by the paintings. Student chests (and heads) will swell with a collective sense of achievement, and all future writing will be that much easier.

Culmination is, however, a slight misnomer. Readers of this essay already will have begun to think of ways for expanding the basic idea presented here. Choosing another painting and writing another story, researching the artists for "painter biographies," taking museum field trips (based, for a change, on disciplined, directed observation of the art), are several of the most obvious extensions of "Great Painting, Great Writing."

I suppose it's necessary to note that I'm not advocating the long hard march to a fully arts-based curriculum, just a willingness to assist students in expanding the perimeters of their experience, and in

Continued on page 18

BUILDING A CHARACTER: FICTION WRITING AND THE STANISLAVSKI METHOD

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In writing a story, the fiction writer will usually conceive a set of characters and an action; then he is faced with the more difficult task of finding appropriate incidents to further the action, and finding the words, gestures, and pacing that will suggest the character's personality to the reader.

In the process of moving from the broad, general character to the specific gesture, word and movement, the writer uses much the same process an actor uses in translating a script into a real stage presence. In the theatre, stage business, gesture and intonation are the craft of the actor, part of "building a character." In prose fiction, however, the writer cannot rely upon the skill of an actor to present his character to the audience. If he wants his reader to visualize a gesture or a facial expression, he must include it in his narration; if he wants to indicate a catch in the voice or a pause, he must either suggest it or say it; if he wants the character to be realistic to the reader, he will have to incorporate a sense of how the character feels about himself, how he carries his body, what kind of objects he feels comfortable around.

Those who teach fiction writing can learn much from those who teach acting. Many of the concepts and exercises developed by Constantin Stanislavski and others are useful in training writers. Three things in particular that an acting coach knows--that a conversation is dynamic in nature, that physical action is a key to the emotional state of a character, and that by changing his circle of attention an actor gives a focal point to a character--can be adapted well to the fiction writing class. They offer us ways of talking to students about the stories they are writing.

It is useful to talk to the student about what happens below the surface of a conversation. The first step is to teach the writer to ask the same kinds of questions a director might ask: How does the character envision himself? (I.e., what is his self-image?) What objective is he trying to accomplish at this moment? What is preventing him from gaining his objective?

On one level, a character's objective might be a major goal, like rescuing a girl in distress or winning the Nobel prize. But more important, below the surface of a conversation is a series of limited objectives, what Viola Spolin (*Improvisation for the Theatre*) calls the "point of concentration." Why did A ask B whether it was raining out? Perhaps his point of concentration was to keep her from walking away; his larger objective is to ask her for a date and eventually to marry her, but first of all he has to catch her attention. It is useful for the student writer to pay attention to a character's point of concentration and his objectives.

A second concept that is useful for a student writer is to think of every conversation as a *contest*. Character A does something to achieve an objective. He encounters resistance, either because his objective conflicts with B's objective and B resists, or because the objective is by nature difficult to accomplish. Whatever the source of resistance, A must persist and expend enough energy to overcome the resistance, or he must capitulate. If there is no dramatic tension at all between the characters, the conversation is probably not useful in exploring the characters or in furthering the plot.

These precepts, that a conversation is a dynamic interaction and that it grows out of the state of mind of the characters, are a good starting point for student fiction writers. Our problem, then, is to suggest techniques that will help them to understand the characters and to portray the characters in their stories.

Stanislavski encouraged his actors to use the "magic if," and ask "what would I do *if* I were in King Lear's position?" By means of the *if* the actor translates Lear's circumstances, objectives, and points of concentration into his own. Similarly, a writer must learn to use his own feelings and his imagination to understand characters who are quite different from himself.

In using the "magic if" to transform oneself into the character, the important element to consider is what Stanislavski calls the "given circumstances." He admonishes his actors that "during every moment of the development of the action of the play, we must be aware either of the external circumstances which surround us. . . or of an inner chain of circumstances which we ourselves have imagined in order to illustrate our parts." (*An Actor Prepares*, p. 60) For the writer, the given circumstances will include the plot, the time and the setting, the conditions of the character's life, and so on. It would be easy to use whort writing exercises in class to demonstrate to the student writer that the same action might be performed in very different ways under different given circumstances. For example, adapting an exercise of Sonia Moore's *(The Stanislavski System*, p. 33), one could instruct students to imagine themselves (via the "magic if") in the following given circumstances, and to write a paragraph describing each action:

a. John puts on a clean shirt following a long day's work in the mine. He is going to a party.

b. John puts on a clean shirt following a long day's work in the mine. There has been an accident in the mine.

As he tries to write paragraphs about the two ways of putting on a shirt, the student will quickly see how different the action is in the two circumstances. He will also see that the only resource he has for finding the exact nature of that difference is to put himself in John's place via the "magic if."

It is easy to see, of course, that both writer and actor must be acute observers of their fellow men. But *copying* what one observes is not enough, for "copies are not created works." (*Building a Character*, p. 29) To create a vivid, realistic character, the writer must tap his own emotions, sensations, and instincts while imagining himself inside the character. If he has carefully built a set of "given circumstances," he will find that certain responses are inhibited, while others will be given free rein. From behind the "mask" of a character, the writer can feel free to release deep-seated emotions that are not appropriate in the writer's own daily circumstances, but which *are* appropriate to a character in that character's particular set of circumstances. By this means, an actor described in Stanislavski's *Building a Character*,

> a modest youth, who would scarcely even speak to a woman, becomes insolent and from behind a mask exposes his most intimately secret instincts and feelings--things he would not dream of mentioning even in a whisper in ordinary life.
>
> Thus a characterization is the mask which hides the actor-individual. Protected by it he can lay bare his soul down to the last intimate detail. (p. 28)

The same use of the "magic if" will work for the student writer. But he needs a technique for stimulating his imagination and for testing the truth of the feelings he attributes to the character he is building. He can search for both kinds of clues in his own muscles.

An actor uses a technique called "muscular memory." As part of his training an actor is asked to concentrate on the muscles he uses in a simple task, until he can feel each muscle moving. He wants to be able to perform the action smoothly and convincingly on stage; hence he practices with the object in his hand, and then without the object.

He is striving for an ability to communicate an action convincingly, and to do it by legitimate means. The acting coach describes the problem in exactly the same terms we use in the fiction-writing classroom. Viola Spolin, in her book *Improvisation for the Theater*, warns: "Interpretation and assumption keep players from direct communication. This is why we say *show*, don't *tell*. Telling is verbally or in some other indirect way indicating what one is doing. . . . Showing means direct contact and direct communication. It does not mean passively pointing to something." (p. 36)

As writing teachers, we are continually saying to our students, "show me, don't tell me," for the young writer faces the same task as the young actor. "Aris sat on the bed," wrote a student, writing about a woman in the moment of deciding to leave her husband. Unfortunately, that detail doesn't show the reader much about the character's feelings at that moment. The student was tempted to try one of two directions, to add "she felt that . . .," or to say "she fought back her tears." The first is obvious telling; the second is a cliché which "tells" just as surely; it is a standard signal of distress, which has no real grounding in this particular character's emotional state.

"*How* did she sit on the bed?" the student was asked. She went home and sat and stood and sat and stood for twenty minutes until she began to understand the connection between the movement and the emotional state. In finding out things about her body she was finding clues to what her emotional state would be in such circumstances.

Stanislavski insisted that discovering the appropriate physical actions would serve as a clue to the psychological state of the character. On the one hand, the reader gets insight into the emotional state of a character by what the character does. On the other hand, what is less obvious is that the writer himself, by starting with action, by striving to create appropriate actions, is discovering truths about the psychological state of his character.

Sonia Moore, in her book *The Stanislavski Method*, writes:

> The building of the character's logic of action is simultaneously the building of the logic and consecutiveness of emotions. Physical action is the 'bait' for emotion, a pretext for involving the psychological life, said Stanislavski. *All attention* must be directed to the execution of physical actions, to their logical consecutiveness. Only truthful, concretely executed physical actions involve the emotions. (p. 27)

Just as an actor is trained to start with an action and a set of circumstances, and to use it as a means to explore the inner state of the character, we should train writers to look first for the proper gesture, movement, action. They should learn to ask *not* "What did he say in response?" but rather "What did he do in response?"

The following is an exercise which uses this principle:

STEP 1. The teacher asks the student to imagine two people who are:
- a. sitting on a bridge, fishing
- b. sitting in a bar
- c. sitting by a tennis court, waiting for a chance to play
- d. doing income tax in the library

In the manner of an acting coach, the teacher asks the student to answer the following questions about the characters:
- a. Do they know each other?
- b. What *one thing* does character A know about character B?
  What *one thing* does character B know about character A?
  (Example: A, a man, sees a beetle crawling on the collar of B, a woman. He can't take his eyes off it. B knows that A is staring at her chest.)
- c. Does A enjoy what he is doing at the moment?
- d. What would A rather be doing? Has he ever done it before?
  What will B probably do instead?
- e. Is A sick/tired/happy/bored? Why?
- f. What objects does A see?
- g. What objects did A bring with him?

STEP 2. The teacher asks the student to describe A and B in a few paragraphs.

STEP 3. The teacher now asks the student to imagine the following situation.
- a. B says to A one of these three sentences:
  "I wish you'd stop singing."
  "When you're done with the girlie magazine, let me look at it."
  "Look what you did to my coat!"
  The student must choose one.
- b. What does A do? What is the first object he handles?
- c. Build a conversation out of this.

The writer must think through "muscular memory" in this exercise. The way to find out what the character did is to use the "magic if" and find out what his own muscles do. He must either do it or imagine it, and use movement to feel his way into the character; when the *action* feels right, he will also have a clue to the psychic state of the character.

In the following example from a student's story, we can see the potential for using muscular memory. The girl in the story was sent by her ailing mother to get help. It is late night; the girl is terrified of the dark and of the neighbors; she is relieved when they don't answer, and she returns to her mother's bedroom.

> Standing beside mama's bed, Mindy felt relief flood warmly into herself at being in the light and safety of this room once more.
> "Nobody answered the door at Karls's," Mindy said. "I tried to wake them, but I couldn't make them hear me."
> "Oh, Mindy, why didn't you yell out to them?" mama asked. "I think they would've heard you calling."
> How could she tell mama she had been too afraid to open her mouth? She remained silent and felt ashamed. She saw how much sicker her mother looked since she had left her. Mindy chewed on the inside of her cheek in worry, wondering what she should do. Then mama's voice drew her attention again. She listened but could scarcely believe what she was hearing.
> "There's no time, Mindy. You have to go next door to Old Charley's and get Morris awake. Pound hard on the door and yell out. Tell him to come quick. Hurry, Mindy."

The student has already begun to use muscular memory: note that Mindy "chewed on the inside of her cheek." But the process can be taken farther. The writer should close her eyes, transform herself into the girl's body and the girl's "given circumstances," and test things that only her muscles can tell her: Are you holding anything in your hands? Did you pick up something, a stone, a stalk of grass, as you stood outside the neigh-

bor's house? Is it still in your hand? Do you walk straight to your mother's bed, or do you stand near the door and approach only when she beckons to you? How do you stand, weight on one or both feet? Do you stand still, or do you fidget? What do you look at as your mother talks--her mouth, her eyes, the coverlet on her bed, your feet, your hands, the stone in your hands, the chalky smudge on your knuckles where you rapped on the neighbors' door? By thinking through the muscular sequence, the writer will find clues to the girl's state of mind that will make it unnecessary to tell us first that "Mindy felt relief flood warmly into herself" and then that she "felt ashamed."

In the process of finding such clues, the writer will find it helpful to use "circles of attention" to focus the reader's attention. A small circle of attention is a small area which includes the character's body and a few objects very close to him. A medium circle of attention includes nearby people, furniture, etc. A large circle of attention includes everything a characer can see.

Certainly in real life a person's attention shifts from small to medium to large circles of attention and back again. But the actor uses it not just for realism but to focus his attention, and through him the audience's attention. When an actor is using a large circle of attention, it is very difficult to keep his attention from wandering and dissipating the audience's attention.

Therefore, Sonia Moore admonishes that "when an actor feels that his attention is wandering, he should immediately direct it to a single object and concentrate on it. When he succeeds and surmounts the difficulty, he can redirect his attention first to a small circle, then to a medium one, then to a large one." (*The Stanislavski System*, p. 40) By contracting to a small circle of attention, the actor is reasserting his reality as a character in a real set of circumstances.

A writer, too, must expand and contract circles of attention to maintain the reader's sense of the reality of the characters. We can see Flannery O'Connor using the technique in "The Displaced Person":

> The loaded car might have been passing mist in the early morning half-light. They continued up the road at the same even pace without looking back.
>
> A dark yellow sun was beginning to rise in a sky that was the same slick dark gray as the highway. The fields stretched away, stiff and weedy, on either side. "Where are we going?" Mr. Shortly asked for the first time.

O'Connor is describing the landscape and suddenly focusses on a small circle of attention. The sudden contraction makes the characters pop vividly back into view.

It works especially well when the narrator is philosophizing; it suddenly reinserts reality. For example, in Norman Maclean's story "A River Runs Through It," the narrator is watching his brother fly fishing in the distance. After a simple description of the scene, he notes: "My brother's wet clothes made it easy to see his strength. Most great casters I have known were big men over six feet . . ." and goes on to discuss abstract qualities of the scene:

> Rhythm was just as important as color and just as complicated. It was one rhythm superimposed upon another, our father's four-count rhythm of the line and wrist being still the base rhythm. But superimposed upon it was the piston two count of his arm and the long overriding four count of the completed figure eight of his reversed loop.
>
> The canyon was glorified by rhythms and colors.
>
> I heard voices behind me, and . . . .

Note the shift to the nearby voices: he cannot sustain the philosophical mood for long, or he risks losing control of the reader's attention.

This concept of the circles of attention is useful in creative writing classes. A student writing a story that required a long flashback used the isolation of an airline flight as an opportunity for her character to daydream. However, because she sustained the daydream so long in her first draft, the reader's attention was allowed to wander from the immediate events. Needing a technique for asserting the personality of the daydreamer, she used circles of attention in her next draft. The character Suzanne is sitting next to her sleeping daughter Inez, and has been daydreaming for a while.

> There were many fine times to remember, like the time Suzanne locked herself out and James climbed two stories onto her roof and then through a window to let her in. Boy, was he mad at her. First for locking herself out, and then when he ripped his pants on the rough window edge. She giggled to herself and forgot for a moment she was on the plane going home, so clear was the recollection. Oh, they were such fun neighbors. They used to wave to each other as they backed out of their driveways . . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> James was surely proud of his children, thought Suzanne as she tucked Inez's blanket around her tighter and gently puller her closer; not any more proud than she was of her children, though. She found herself stiffening back in the seat and almost whimpering aloud. The movement stirred Inez a little. Suzanne held her uncomfortable position until Inez was breathing deeply again and her thumb moving in and out with a steady sucking. Suzanne pulled her legs up underneath herself, took a deep breath and let her head fall back against the seat. As she stared toward the darkened plane window, she could see James and Jimmy Boy and Roxy . . . .

Here we see two contractions. The first is a giggle which brings us momentarily back to the plane. The second is the stiffening of muscles in the small of her back (a very small circle of attention); her attention then expands to the daughter next to her, and finally expands again. By using circles of attention in this manner, she has broken the monotony of a long flashback, refocused the reader's attention, and gradually returned to the flashback. At the same time, she is making her character seem more real. The technique she used was to imagine herself sitting in an airplane seat and trying to feel what physical sensation would eventually grow strong enough to intrude on her thoughts. The stiffening of her back and the movement of the child she was holding seemed to grow out of the character and the circumstance.

Thus, this student was able to use the techniques of the actor in the process of revising a narrative. The "magic if," muscular memory, and circles of attention are useful to student writers in giving them ways of thinking through problems they encounter. It is easy for the writer to let characters become transparent or to use stock, shorthand methods of portraying them. By transforming himself into the character as he writes, the writer is less likely to lose sight of his characters.

In summary, the creative writing teacher can emulate the methods used to train actors in two ways. The first way is to teach the writer to imagine himself in a character's situation, and to teach him to pay attention not only to environmental cues but also to the limitations and demands of the character's body. A number of exercises from standard acting texts can be adapted to the writing classroom to increase the writer's awareness of such elements.

The second way is to teach the writer to constantly evaluate his "performance." Whenever he finds passages in which the characters lack vividness and veracity, he can return to the techniques of muscular memory and circles of attention as a way of refocusing attention on the characters. Ultimately, by using this way of thinking, both in conceiving the characters and in revising the narrative, he will be able to present to the reader characters with continuity, coherence, and substance.

RECOMMENDED READING

Beckerman, Bernard. *Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970.

Not a textbook on acting, but a good discussion of the nature of tension in a conversation. Beckerman also discusses well the implications of such things as the plot-story ratio, which are of interest to the prose fiction-writer as well.

Moore, Sonia. *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of an Actor*. New York: Viking, 1965.

A valuable book for two reasons: first, it is the most concise explanation I know of the theory and the technique of "method" acting; second, Moore offers exercises for student actors that can be adapted easily to the writing classroom.

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theatre: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1963.

A compendium of exercises for teaching improvisation. Spolin explains the value of each exercise and suggests how an acting coach should respond to what happens. Her explanations make it easy to find related exercises for the fiction writing classroom.

Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1948.

_____. *Building a Character*. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949.

It is hard to find ways of directly using these two books in the classroom (though I always use chapter 3, "Characters and Types," from *Building a Character*, in my classes). But they are invaluable in showing the way an actor thinks and changes his thinking as he becomes more skillful.

Great Painting, Great Writing
Continued from page 11

the process, finding new ways of seeing and perceiving the world. These lessons, at the very least, will help you to gain new breadth and variety in the compositions you receive every week, and at the most, may kindle in a young breast a lifelong enthusiasm for art and beauty, not a bad by-product of a mere writing unit.

Plato, I believe it was, said long ago that a person was never more fully a person than when contemplating The Beautiful. And you know, he was very nearly right. The truth of the matter is, people lay claim to the full measure of their humanity only when actively responding to The Beautiful. It is because it serves so well in strengthening this claim that the "Great Painting, Great Writing" unit is such a valuable part of a writing program.

DEVELOPING A COMPOSITION SKILLS CURRICULUM GUIDE

KAREN HIRSCH
AVRIL FONT
Eau Claire Public Schools

We hear it from parents: "Carol has trouble writing a complete sentence." Administrators tell us: "We need more emphasis on composition skills." Business people complain: "This applicant can't spell or punctuate." Statistics flow from the National Assessment of Educational Progress: "Between 10% and 25% of children aged 9, 13, and 17 continue to have serious problems with writing."

Difficult to teach and tricky as well as tedious to grade, composition skills are sometimes neglected in schools. Teachers, products themselves of thin writing curricula, may not feel the confidence to help others gain those skills.

Eau Claire teachers have long been encouraged to teach writing and praised for their efforts. Aware, however, of the need for delineation and sequencing of individual writing skills, our central administrators created a committee to write a composition skills guide for grades 1-6. The committee, comprised of representatives from each grade level, worked under the direction of our elementary supervisor and assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum.

First we studied guides prepared in other cities, as well as those developed within individual schools in our own district. Then, working as a group we identified all the skills of composition, and decided at which grade level each skill should be introduced. An excerpt is illustrative:

Sentence Building

1-2-3-4 - Composing simple sentences
2-3 - Writing sentences in order
3-4 - Composing compound sentences
2 - With single words
3-4 - With phrases
5 - With clauses
4-5 - With coordinating conjunctions
5-6 - With subordinating conjunction
5-6 - Recognizing run-on sentences and sentence fragments

Next, working with partners, grade level teachers developed specific lessons, with detailed presentation ideas, for each skill identified as an introductory level item at that grade level. For example, two fifth grade teachers worked from the following list designated as introductory skills at at the fifth grade.

Sentence/Paragraph
- Topic Sentence
- Supporting Sentence
- Concluding Sentence
- Developing, Improving paragraphs

Sentence Building
- With Single Words
- With Phrases
- With Clauses
- With Coordinating Conjunctions
- With Subordinating Conjunctions

Outlining
Poetry
Description
Persuasion
Letters
- Personal
- Business

Exposition
Book Reports
Research/Reporting
Criticism
Narration

We followed a pattern for each item. We stated the skill, the general language concept involved, and the objective of the given skill. We then provided a suggested lesson activity to introduce the skill, such as reproducible worksheets, pertinent pages in the classroom English book, possible pages in other available texts, and ideas of our own. We included these practical outlines to make the Curriculum Guide more functional and to insure greater implementation of it. Following are examples of fifth grade skills as they appear in the Guide. Note that each covers a different general concept of language.

SKILL: Colons.

CONCEPT: Language has certain mechanical conventions.

OBJECTIVES: The student will be able to use colons correctly where needed.

ACTIVITIES: 1. Write the following activity on the board or overhead projector. Have students explain their answers.

If a colon is needed in any of the three sentences below, write it in the sentences.

a. I packed the following equipment a sleeping bag, my fishing tackle, and a first aid kit. (equipment)
b. Some animals that we see at the park are deer, beavers, racoons, and brown bears. (none needed)
c. These activities still have openings for new members gymnastics, photography, and conservation. (members)

2. Use timecables (bus or train) to look up times various transports leave and arrive. 3:15 p.m.--etc. (use of colon)

3. Children can use newspapers to look for use of the colon.

RESOURCES: Silver Burdett, pp. 162-163, 372-373, 379, 395
MacMillan, p. 101

SKILL: Building sentences with coordinating conjunctions.

CONCEPT: Language has variety of structure.

OBJECTIVES: The student will be able to build sentences with coordinating conjunctions.

ACTIVITIES: 1. Duplicate the sentences and have students combine sentences into one.

a. The cat yawned. The cat stretched.
b. The sirens blew. They disturbed my sleep.
c. Several birds landed on the feeder. They cleaned it out.
d. Mr. Julio read the paper. He ate breakfast.
e. Homer was late for school. Homer was late for lunch.

2. Have children write a short story about their favorite meal. Is it breakfast, lunch, or supper? Do they prefer to dat at home or at a restaurant? What kinds of food do they like? Students must include at least three compound sentences in their stories.

3. Spotlight on Writing, pp. 76-77, 92-93
Appendix E 6, E 7, E 8

RESOURCES: Laidlaw, pp. 246-249, 392, 393

SKILL: Personal/friendly letter.

CONCEPT: Language is communication.

OBJECTIVES: The student will be able to write a friendly letter.

ACTIVITIES:
1. Check professional teachers' magazines for pen pals. Set up a pen pal exchange with a class in another part of the United States.
2. Have children write to friends who live elsewhere or relatives. Mail the letters.
3. A week before Valentines Day, have children draw for "Secret Pals." Each day the children can write a short letter to their "secret pals."

RESOURCES: Laidlaw, pp. 230-232, 354
MacMillan, pp. 62-65, 67, 344
Silver Burdett, pp. 153-156, 160-163, 166, 169

The final guide was a refinement of the grade level partners' work. This was completed by our elementary supervisor in the summer following the committee's work in early June. She included a full Scope and Sequence, identifying not only the levels of skill introduction, but the grades at which those skills should be further emphasized and practiced (Development), mastered (Functional), and emphasized as needed (Reinforcement). It was prepared in a loose-leaf format, so changes could be made as needed. This format and the inclusion of sample lessons are consistent with our district policy to consider curriculum guides as working documents, which can be used as a guide for teachers planning lessons.

The curriculum guide was distributed during an in-service meeting in the fall. The teachers attended grade-level presentations given by the representative teachers from the composition committee. The purposes of these meetings were to acquaint our colleagues with the guide and to encourage the teaching of writing on a standarized, predictable, sequenced basis. Time was provided for questions, suggestions, and sharing of ideas.

Our Composition Skills Guide has been in use for one school year, and we are pleased with most of the feedback. Teachers seem generally more aware of the importance of composition skills and more confident in the technique of teaching the process of writing. Though we have discovered ways to improve it, we basically find it a useful, practical document, helpful to us in teaching composition.

NEW PUBLICATION: THE WISCONSIN ALTERNATIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN IN BASIC ENGLISH/COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR GRADES 9 and 10

The Wisconsin Alternative Design comprises two new publications generated from a twenty-five cell matrix embracing the five major functions of communication (informing, feeling, imagining, ritualizing and controlling) as one dimension, and five audience contexts (intrapersonal, dyadic, small group, public and mass communication) as second dimension.

Each lesson or unit contains a reading, writing, speaking and listening activity centered around a specific communication function and audience context. This alternative curriculum design ensures an integration of the language arts for students in grades 9 and 10.

Obtainable from: The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Publications Office, 125 S. Webster, P. O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707 for $3.50 each.

BOOKS
FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Suzanne Newton, *M.V. Secton Speaking*. New York: The Viking Press, 1981. 196 pp. Ages 11-14.

M.V. is Martha Venable Sexton, a sixteen-year-old orphan, who has lived for ten years with her somber aunt and silent uncle. She tells her own story in *M.V. Sexton Speaking*, and tells us that she is smart, out-spoken, and lonely. Her life changes when, at her aunt's insistence, she takes a job at the local bakery. The baker and his wife do not simply employ M.V.; they teach her--about the importance of spontaneity, honesty, fortitude, and other themes. Their conversations with M.V. are rarely about anything as ordinary as the weather or a burned cherry pie. Newton adds another savy adult, a young and attractive single man, who befriends M.V. When they meet, they discuss the importance of friendship, courage, etc. Because of the influence of these three adults, M.V. becomes an attractive and popular young lady. In turn, she brings happiness to her aunt and uncle, all in the space of a few weeks. Her aunt and uncle have sage words for all, too, after the change in their lives.

The story has potential for being interesting to girls aged 11 to 14. The untold story of M.V.'s parents, the presence of a rich and powerful villain, and a heroine who is something of an underdog--all are features likely to appeal to young readers. Each of those features could have been developed more fully. Instead, Newton chose to emphasize lessons learned by M.V. How young readers do respond will depend on their tolerance for the didactic emphasis Newton achieves at some cost to a fully developed story. Linda Western, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Magorian, Michelle. *Good Night, Mr. Tom*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981. Ages 12 and up.

Willie Beech is an abused child of a single mother. Evacuated along with other children from London during World War II to a rural village, he is housed with Mr. Tom, a reclusive, brusque older man. The boy, taught to be still or face a beating and the wrath of the devil, is fearful and apathetic as well as seriously undernourished. The two take to each other, gradually, and Will makes his first-ever friend - to his great amazement. The book delicately traces the changes in Will and Mr. Tom as they learn and grow. But then he is returned to his mother. The story doesn't end here. The new Will is a greater threat to the mother; her abuse becomes more violent. How Mr. Tom comes to the rescue and what evolves concludes the story.

The tale is touching without being cloying. The ordinary happenings at the outset, occasionally charged with humor and always with sensitivity are balanced by the dramatic events of the second section. The characterization, restrained but telling, is ingratiating. Despite the harsh child-abuse statement, the text more surely reflects the nature of love and friendship, the ready helpfulness and support of kind people, and the reaching out for stability and self-hood. There are, indeed, safe havens to grow in. Nicholas J. Karolides, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Vasil Bykov, *Pack of Wolves*. Tr. Lynn Solotaroff. New York: Crowell, 1981. 179 pp. Grades 7-12.

Pack of Wolves is a World War II story. The setting is Soviet Russia. A company of Soviet partisans, surrounded by German forces and badly battered, faces certain defeat. Levchuk, a wounded partisan, is ordered to lead three others in an escape attempt. The three others include a wounded paratrooper, an old wagon driver, and the company radio operator, who is pregnant. They make their way laboriously through swamps and woods, and hide in a bombed-out village. There the radio operator gives birth to her child. For a brief moment the focus is on new life and happiness. Then Russian collaborators and German soldiers find the group and attack. The partisans resist fiercely, but only Levchuk and Victor, the child, survive.

The story is told retrospectively. Levchuk learns in 1973 that Victor, from whom he had quickly been separated, has survived to adulthood. As he travels to visit Victor, Levchuk recalls the events of the war in a series of flashbacks.

Vasil Bykov is widely published in Europe, but *Pack of Wolves* is his first work to be published in the United States. It is of more than passing interest because of the Soviet perspective it provides on aspects of World War II. The impact of the war on the civilian population is made clear, especially in the vicious strife that ensued between collaborators and partisans. Levchuk, the hero, is markedly a Soviet hero: tough, technical and practical in his general views, contemptuous of superstition and useless sentiment. The post-war world that is sketched briefly as Levchuk pursues his reunion with Victor is a humming, developed world in which Soviet children, who are well informed about fascism, now play safely, thanks to the heroism of people like Levchuk. It is, in other words, a patriotic story. It does not glamorize or idealize war, but it expresses more-or-less official views of gratitude and respect for people who fought to defend their country.

Richard Western, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Duncan, W.R. *The Queen's Messenger*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1982. SHS-Mature.

This fast paced adventure of international intrique set in Southeast Asia could easily hook me on spy thrillers. Clive Barnes of British intelligence is sent to trace Marston, a Queen's Messenger, who's disappeared with his portfolio of messages. The trail takes him from Hong Kong to Bangkok and into the jungles of Thailand, each step fraught with threatened danger and attempted mayhem and murder. The unraveling web reveals at its center an American deserter - his odyssey serves as the plot's counterpoint. Marston had carried his message. His ready-to-be-revealed knowledge about Russian machinations and British treason will cost him his life and Marston's unless Barnes gets there first. A spellbinder of the first order.

Nicholas J. Karolides, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Donner, Florinda. *Shabono*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1982. SHS-Mature.

The primitive culture of an Indian tribe deep in the South American jungle is revealed in this closely personal account by an anthropologist. An extraordinary expression of the feelings as well as the beliefs of these people, it represents also the author's feelings through her memory for her data was destroyed. As such it reads like narrative, evoking through its descriptive details individuals acting out their lives in an exotic (for us) environment.

Nicholas J. Karolides, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

FOR TEACHERS

Nina P. Shaughnessy. *Errors and Expectations*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Errors and Expectations, subtitled *A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, grew out of the author's experience with poorly prepared students at the City University of New York, which opened the doors of its eighteen tuition-free colleges to every resident with a high school diploma. A report on a unique seven-year study of the writing problems of unprepared students, it is a perceptive and thorough analysis of the weaknesses in their writing.

In the first chapter Professor Shaughnessy gives a general description of the problems of students in Basic Writing classes. These students, she points out, are accustomed to expressing themselves orally and to writing what they hear. They lack writing experience and have poor reading habits. Consequently, there are likely to be as many as thirty errors in every three hundred words that they write.

In a series of chapters, the author analyzes these errors and describes some successful techniques of teaching them to correct their errors and to develop larger units of expression. She analyzes, first, punctuation, follows with the kinds of syntactic errors made, and then identifies and classifies mechanical errors. The exercises included in most of the chapter are especially valuable. The proposed cures for the syntactic ones are interesting but not very specific, the two best suggestions being the teaching of small groups and the linking of other

classes to the writing class. She sets forth two propositions on mechanical errors. One is that students will never rid themselves of all errors; the other, that a common error now and then is not likely to damage the work of an otherwise good writer. Most teachers would agree with the first but not with the second. Four or five errors on the page of an application letter, a business report, or a graduate thesis would probably prejudice an employer or a professor against the writer.

Two helpful chapters focus on spelling and vocabulary. Following the analysis and classification of the different kinds of misspelling, Professor Shaughnessy presents nine practical suggestions for improving spelling. Especially helpful is a spelling chart that can serve as a tool for classification of a student's errors.

The discussion of vocabulary shows clearly why the BW student has difficulty acquiring facility with academic language. The author assumes that he will try to use that kind of language in his first college assignments although mastery of it will be very slow. But should students with poor vocabularies be encouraged to use academic language before they have mastered the idioms of everyday discourse? Realistically she suggests that the words the student has to learn must be reduced in number and that the responsibility for vocabulary development should be assumed by all teachers.

In the chapter, "Beyond the Sentence," the author describes the difficulty that BW students have with two conventions of academic discourse. The first convention, that writers range widely between concrete and abstract statements, is a problem for students who lack the vocabulary and the ability to generalize. The second convention, that writers emphasize the logical and rhetorical relationships between sentences, paragraphs, and other units of composition, baffles inexperienced writers who lack skill in organization.

"Expectations," cites some examples of how a few severely handicapped students were able to write with significantly greater skills after one or two semester of instruction. However, a table included in this chapter indicates that only three-fifths of the BW students gave evidence of overall or marked improvement.

The Appendix to the book contains suggested essay topics and a bibliography. The essay topics seem suitable for well prepared freshmen but too difficult for BW students. The bibliography is excellent, consisting of well selected and classified titles.

While valuable, *Errors and Expectations* is not totally satisfying. One wishes that Professor Shaughnessy had provided more statistical data on the progress of students in the program at the City University of New York. She describes in some detail the progress of one student over a three-year period. It would be very useful to know whether many other students made this same kind of progress and how many students completed the four-year program required for graduation. Such statistics would help college and university administrators to design courses of study for poorly prepared students at other institutions.

Kathleen Markovich, Roseville, Minnesota

Steward, Joyce S. and Mary K. Croft. *The Writing Laboratory: Organization, Management and Methods*. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1982.

What section of this eminently useful book will most engage your attention will depend on the type of writing laboratory you are operating--a separate unit or a classroom "activity." The book specifically identifies with the former but its contents suit a range of operations. Basically, it establishes the philosophy, approaches, financing and management of the lab; it describes alternative physical arrangements and details the selection and training of tutors. And it defines the lab process.

The excitement of the text is in the suggested procedures and activities: pre-writing techniques, sample papers with simulated tutor-writer conferences, procedures for diagnosis, problem solving and revising-editing and suggestions for small group instruction. These, usable in varied situations, reflect fundamental writing processes. Also useful is the section on the selection and development of materials, the extensive bibliography and the appendix of training aids, forms and promotional materials. A highly valuable book.

Nicholas J. Karolides, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 29 - Index: *Wisconsin English Journal*/Volumes 1-15. Compiled by Eugene Engeldinger and Barbara Stevens, UW-Eau Claire. $2.00 - member/member libraries; $3.00 - non-members.

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 30 - Bibliography of Science Fiction. April, 1974. Compiled by Roger D. Sween, UW-Platteville. A listing, briefly annotated, of almost 300 recommended novels, short stories, and anthologies, 43 best films from 1902-1972, and 28 secondary sources included. $1.00

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 31 - Censorship in Wisconsin Public High Schools, 1973. Lee A. Burress, UW-Stevens Point. A follow-up of his 1964 study; current censorship trends and developments related to Supreme Court decisions. 75¢

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 34 - Books Students Recommend to Their Friends. Compiled by Mary K. Feirn and Joyce S. Steward, UW-Madison for the Committee on Current Reading. $1.00

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 35 - An annotated Bibliography of Fantasy Literature. Compiled by Robert H. Boyer and Kenneth J. Zahorski, St. Norbert College, DePere, Wis. An annotated listing of fantasy primary works, reference tools, full-length critical works, essays, magazines, associations, dealers and publishers. Complements Sween's Bibliography of Science Fiction (Service Bulletin No. 30). $1.00

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 36 - Research: Composition Teaching Methods and Teaching Purposes. "Teaching Public Written Discourse: The Blending of Communicative Effectiveness and Mechanical Correctness" by Joanne Yatvin, Crestwood School, Madison; "Writing Competencies Needed by High School Graduates" by Robert A. McKaag, UW-Oshkosh. 75¢

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 37 - Wisconsin Authors: Literary Map and Bulletin. Compiled by Duane and Maureen Roen. The twenty-three by twenty-nine-inch map includes drawings of scenes from the lives or the books of thirty-seven major Wisconsin authors. The map also includes a list of 126 adult authors and 60 juvenile authors. The 41-page bulletin includes all of the information found on the map, as well as a wealth of biolgraphical and bibliographic material. Many titles listed are labeled as ones suitable for either elementary or secondary students. $3.00 plus $1.00 postage for map and bulletin ($1.00 for bulletin alone).

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 38 - Bibliography of Native American Books for Elementary Grades. April, 1979. Compiled by Maxine Burress, UW-Stevens Point. An annotated bibliography of books for children, grades K-8. Grade levels are indicated. 75¢

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 39 - Alcohol and Alcoholism in Children's Literature. Compiled by Carl Personke, UW-Madison. An annotated bibliography of books on alcohol, alcohol abuse and alcoholism. Evaluation of effectiveness is included. 60¢

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 40 - Index: *Wisconsin English Journal*/Volumes 16-20. Compiled by Barbara Stevens, UW-Eau Claire. See Service Bulletin No. 29. $1.00

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 41 - A Small Community Serves Its Gifted. April 1981. By Monica L. Josten, South Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A discussion of a program for gifted students including the method of selecting students, handling problems, curriculum and the results of the program's operation.

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 42 - Elementary Children's Writing--A Study and an Approach. Beverly Nordberg, Fox Point, 1982. Discussion of criteria for evaluating children's writing and their application. Teaching suggestions offered. 75¢

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 43 - Wisconsin Writers. Compiled by Robert Wells. An overview of current Wisconsin writers with a bibliography of their work. 75¢

SERVICE BULLETIN No. 44 - Evaluating Student Writing. February, 1982. Nancy S. Haugen, UW-Madison. Discussion of evaluation principles and tactics with specific time saving suggestions. 75¢